

## Analysis

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**Summary:** Turkey's rapid economic growth has earned it a place among the world's leading emerging markets. Turkey has also expanded its geopolitical influence through participation in multilateral initiatives and assumed greater leadership in global development efforts. As its aid efforts increase, the strategic design and delivery of aid is a subject of increasing importance. As key allies in Turkish foreign policy and as experienced donors, U.S. and European aid agencies can also share valuable experience on engaging civil society throughout all aspects of development practices. This will foster greater harmonization among U.S., European, and Turkish aid agencies, promote cooperation between the government and the civil society sector, strengthen the quality and impact of aid delivered, and multiply the impact of Turkey's soft power in the global development arena.

## New Opportunities for Cooperation in Designing and Delivering International Aid

by Filiz Bikmen

### Introduction

Over the past ten years, Turkey's rapid economic growth has earned it a place among the world's leading emerging markets. At the same time, Turkey has expanded its geopolitical influence through participation in multilateral initiatives such as the UN Security Council and assumed greater leadership in global development efforts.<sup>1</sup>

In line with these developments, Turkey's official development aid (channeled through TIKA, Turkey's aid agency) reached a peak of approximately US\$1 billion in 2011. Accordingly, Turkey has also agreed to contribute \$200 million annually to the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDC) initiative, with a total of \$5 billion by 2015 and a target of \$10 billion total by 2020. This demonstrates Turkey's plans for assuming even greater responsibility in promoting global social and economic development.

Given this trend, the strategic design and delivery of aid is a subject of increasing importance. Throughout this process, TIKA can benefit greatly by coordinating with a broader range

of Turkish NGOs in harnessing expertise in designing, delivering, and evaluating aid programs.

As key allies in Turkish foreign policy and as experienced donors, U.S. and European aid agencies can also share valuable experience on engaging civil society throughout all aspects of development practices. This will foster greater harmonization among U.S., European, and Turkish aid agencies, promote cooperation between the government and the civil society sector (also known as the third sector), strengthen the quality and impact of aid delivered, and multiply the impact of Turkey's soft power in the global development arena.

### The Case for Engaging the New Partners

Expanding the realm of partnership between government and the third sector in promoting human, social, and democratic development yields more effective outcomes and sustainable impact. For example, USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development) and EuropeAid (Directorate General for Development and Cooperation of the EU) have developed clear strategies and mechanisms to engage a

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1. Daniel M. Klima and Richard Fontaine, "Global Swing States: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Turkey, and the Future of International Order," German Marshall Fund, November 2012, <http://www.gmfus.org/programs/asia/global-swing-states/>



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broad and diverse range of NGOs in the creation and assessment of aid policies. As a result, NGOs in these countries are also more aware and involved in the development aid programs of their respective countries. These agencies also have defined methods to include NGOs as key stakeholders in the development process and allocate significant funds to develop civil society in recipient countries. The Swedish Aid Agency (SIDA) is also among the leading donors in the area of building and strengthening civil society globally.

TIKA is still at the very early stages of engaging civil society in Turkey and abroad. To date, only a very limited group of NGOs has engaged with TIKa in the delivery of aid. TIKa also lacks a strategy to engage local NGOs as partners in development programs, nor do they have a targeted program and allocated budget to strengthen civil society (in aid recipient countries). By working with Turkish NGOs and U.S. and European aid agencies, TIKa can develop more collaborative strategies to engage civil society, thus fostering a more inclusive and sustainable approach for development aid programs.

### The Potential for Partnership with Turkish NGOs

Over the past decade or so, the civil society sector in Turkey has grown in size and strength. Increased adherence to international standards with regards to basic rights and freedoms loosened the tight grip of laws and regulations that, for nearly two decades, limited the space and autonomy of NGOs and foundations. The scope and amount of EU and other bilateral funding has also increased, helping to build a stronger sector and increase the capacity of NGOs at the national and local levels.

During this time, partnerships between NGOs and local/national government have also been on the rise, which has channeled the expertise, experience, and resources of civil society to promote Turkey's human and social development. For example, the NGO AKUT (Search and Rescue Association), has contributed extensive relief, rescue, and reconstruction expertise for natural disaster management. ACEV, the Mother Child Education Foundation, has designed and rolled out programs for hundreds of thousands of people in the area of women's literacy, father training, and early childhood education. The Education Reform Initiative at the Istanbul Policy Center/Sabancı University has applied

its far-reaching capabilities to monitor education spending and policy, convene stakeholders, and help the Ministry of Education consider more effective alternatives. Given the opportunity and a clear framework for collaboration, the collective knowledge and experience of these and other NGOs could effectively be channeled toward Turkey's aid programming efforts abroad.

### Developing Inclusive Strategies for Social Change and Sustainability

Equally vital for developing and implementing effective development strategy and programming is the active involvement of NGOs in aid recipient countries. In this light, the approach of donors has been a subject of great debate, leading to the increase in the creation of various principles and codes of conduct for "aid effectiveness." While China's approach in South Africa, for example, has been criticized for excluding the local population, Turkey's approach of applying a more "intimate model" in delivering aid in Somalia is certainly to be applauded.<sup>2</sup> The Istanbul Program for Action for the Least Developed Countries initiative (to which Turkey is a major donor) also goes beyond basic relief programs and includes strategies for social change, such as empowerment of women and youth, which is also to be commended.

However, the sheer complexity of social change efforts requires the active participation of civil society to make sure that diverse voices of right-holders are heard, and that rights-bearers are held to account for their respective actions and inactions. Giving NGOs a voice during the design and implementation of programs increases the inclusiveness of development programs, and ensures that NGOs are on board for the long journey of changing social beliefs and systems (laws, policies, and practices) that perpetrate cycles of injustice and inequality. TIKa should take active and clear measures to ensure this in all of its country operations.

Yet in order for NGOs to be equal and effective partners in the development process, they must have capacity and skills. TIKa should create specific programs to support the development of a strong and vibrant civil society, and build the capacity of NGOs. Investing in this field is critical for

<sup>2</sup> World Policy Institute, "Turkey Shocks Africa," Winter 2012, <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/winter2012/turkey-shocks-africa>



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both immediate goals and the long-term sustainability of the development programs that TIKA will support.

When creating civil society partnership and support strategies, it is vital that donors also think ahead to their potential exit strategies, as one day in the future, they will eventually scale down aid and operations. For example, in the next few years, the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) will be planning their exit from India. This is going to have a significant impact on the civil society sector, which DFID has allocated considerable resources to build. Keeping this in mind from the very beginning will be important for TIKA, which can draw on the experiences of seasoned donors, and develop tactics to strengthen the civil society sector while also encouraging local domestic funders to assume an active role.

In Turkey for example, since the Ottoman Era and for most of the Republican Era, private philanthropy has funded what I refer to as the “hardware” of society: schools, hospitals, dorms, and so on. Yet, the “software” is equally critical, supporting human development, and changing the social beliefs and systems that perpetrate inequality.<sup>3</sup> Building hundreds of schools for girls is not enough; it is necessary to also encourage principles of gender equality in education — a massive social change effort that can take generations to achieve. While many foreign aid agencies and programs (the EU, bi-lateral funds) and other foreign foundations are aware of the importance of funding such efforts, for most Turkish donors, the appeal of physical buildings or educational scholarships is greater. However, aid agencies and other foreign sources of funds can also help local domestic donors understand this value and develop strategies to support social change. This is an important role for TIKA.

In order to ensure utmost accountability and transparency of aid funds, TIKA should take great care in developing stringently transparent and accountable practices in selecting and funding partners, without being overbearingly complex and thus discouraging. Funds that are allocated to NGOs for aid delivery are a form of public funds. As such, the allocation of these funds should adhere to rigorous procedures and policies with clear and public reporting standards, for both recipients and TIKA.

### New Opportunities for Cooperation with the United States and Europe

The strategic alliance and partnership between Turkey and the United States and Europe is without question of central importance, now more than ever — not only due to Turkey’s increasing role in global development, but also in light of recent conflicts and respective development challenges in its immediate neighborhood. The expansion of TIKA’s aid programs creates new opportunities and channels for cooperation with Europe and the United States — particularly in developing strategies for working with civil society.

USAID and European aid agencies have extensive experience in this area. They have defined and applied clear frameworks for engaging their own domestic NGOs in the process of designing, implementing, and assessing development aid programs. For example, in 2002, EuropeAid published two important documents to guide its strategy for working with “non-state” actors on two levels — one in the formation of development policy, the other for external relations in recipient countries. They also, through designated programs, extensively support activities to strengthen civil society in aid recipient countries, to ensure that civil society is an active and effective contributor to the development and democratization process.

Supporting activities that are vital for a strong and active civil society is also a common strategy of these agencies. For example, USAID and SIDA provide extensive support to the International Center for Not for Profit Law (ICNL), which works with governments, civil society organizations, and the international community in more than 100 countries to improve the legal environment for civil society, philanthropy, and public participation around the world. ICNL is the project manager for USAID’s Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index, which provides up to date information about the legal framework, financial viability, and organizational capacity of civil society in 50 countries in Middle East/North Africa, Central/Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia. SIDA also supports ICNL and other global NGO partners through the Civil Society Initiative, a program to increase aid effectiveness and strengthen UN mechanisms with regards to promoting and protecting the right to freedoms of association, assembly, and expression. The European Commission directorates, including EuropeAid has provided extensive support and worked in close

<sup>3</sup> Filiz Bikmen, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 2008-1, <http://www.turkishpolicy.com/article/350/from-hardware-to-software-charity-to-strategy-a-roadmap-for-progressiver-philanthropy-in-turkey-spring-2008/>





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cooperation with ICNL's affiliate, the European Center for Not for Profit Law (ECNL), on creating an enabling legal environment for civil society, civil society-government cooperation, EU funding policies, and mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability. Through this vital support, NGOs in countries all over the world get the technical assistance and support they need to ensure civil society can exist and operate freely and contribute to social and economic development.

### **Making Civil Society and Democracy Building Central to Turkey's Development Strategies**

TIKA is actively working to increase coordination and harmonization with other multilateral and bi-lateral agencies, as well as increase its own capacity through a recent program with UNDP. Donors such as USAID, EuropeAid, and SIDA can also share expertise and experiences with TIKa to help design strategies for engaging and cooperating with NGOs and supporting the development of civil society. A series of workshops and seminars with aid agency leadership, staff, and Turkish and international NGOs would provide valuable input for these efforts. New studies and publications about lessons learned and how to apply this in practice would also be of great benefit not only for Turkey, but also for other countries such as Brazil, India, and China, which are also expanding their global development efforts.

TIKA can make use of this information to more proactively and effectively engage NGOs in Turkey and recipient countries in a consultative process to draft a strategy cooperation and partnership. Greater cooperation with NGOs and civil society in Turkey and abroad will ultimately increase the effectiveness and sustainability of TIKa's development assistance. Taking this into account in the early stages of TIKa's strategic and operational plans will ensure that Turkey's role in the global development arena will be one that also promotes healthy and functioning democracies to support and sustain human and economic development. As close allies on many fronts, Europe and the United States can be vital partners in this respect, sharing lessons learned and effective practices that can be integrated in the development of new strategies and programs.

#### **About the Author**

Filiz Bikmen has been working in the philanthropic and nonprofit sector since 2001, providing support and guidance to individuals and organizations pursuing social change initiatives in Turkey and abroad. She currently serves as vice chairman of the International Center for Not for Profit Law. She has a masters degree in organizational psychology from Columbia University and a dual degree in psychology and business communications from SUNY Brockport.

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